

## PATAGONIA FOCUS GROUP ASSIGNMENT

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### **Background:**

We are researching how Patagonia can expand their brand into the world of athleisure. We plan on using the appeal of Patagonia's sustainable practices to convince eco-conscious buyers to consider Patagonia for everyday wear. In our focus group we wanted to explore the perception of Patagonia, whether people consider them primarily an outdoor brand instead of an everyday wear brand, and how often environmentalism can shift buyers in the direction of other brands, especially including price as a factor. (Are they willing to pay more for an environmentally conscious brand?) All of these questions play into our overarching research question, "how can Patagonia use environmentalism to increase sales of athleisure/everyday wear and justify current pricing?" We believe that there is a market of individuals who will want to buy Patagonia products that are more accessible for daily use that will cite environmentalism as their rationale. The purpose of this focus group is to explore this and all the related research questions amongst a possible demographic of those who will be purchasing these items - college students (the individuals who will be in our focus group.)

### **Method:**

Our focus group was conducted in the late afternoon, beginning at 5:20pm and ending at approximately 5:40pm on Wednesday September 16th, 2020. Our focus group included ten participants, with five Patagonia representatives observing or moderating. As Patagonia representatives, we distinguished ourselves with a brand background. All members of the focus group appeared to be college aged (18-23) with a majority of members being female. The majority of participants were caucasian, with a small minority being people of color. There was notably an Indigenous American male who was outspoken about his experiences with Patagonia in relation to his ethnicity. Our general procedure was to begin with ice breakers, and follow a powerpoint that would allow for more seamless communication over Zoom. We included the questions we were discussing in the powerpoint, and allowed open dialogue to commence after our moderator, Lia, repeated the phrases that appeared. We asked questions centering around environmentalism, consumer purchasing habits, and perceptions of Patagonia. We also probed in order to find out why Patagonia was viewed the way that it was. Our overall goal was to present these questions in a manner that could help us discover how to best market athleisure wear.

### **Responses:**

The participants revealed their consumer behaviors during the focus group. These behaviors tended to vary widely based on the person. When asked how often they purchase clothing, the answers ranged between twice a week and twice a year. The answers correlated with gender, with women purchasing clothes much more often than men. When they purchased clothes, the participants said they looked for price, versatility, and quality. There was not much variation in that category. Several of the participants agreed with one another that price was the

overwhelming factor in purchasing their clothing. This agreement was made between both women and men. All of the participants said they wanted to support environmentally friendly brands, but several expressed that the price prevents them from doing so. As far as their purchasing habits with Patagonia, the participants said they purchased a mix of leisure and athletic clothes - such as jackets, shorts, t-shirts, and pullovers.

The majority of participants envisioned Patagonia as an outdoor brand. When asked what they associated with this brand, participants said nature and outdoors activities, such as hiking and rafting. They especially said that this brand is prevalent in Asheville, North Carolina for this city is known for its outdoors activities. One participant said that in Asheville they actually wear Patagonia for function; “it is an expensive brand, so it’s not just like, look at my Patagonia hoodie, some people actually use the products to be outside.” Most participants agreed that Patagonia has high prices. One person foremost identified Patagonia with the word “rich.” They recognized this as a consequence of it being an environmentally-conscious brand. Two participants specifically pinpointed two aspects of Patagonia’s sustainability efforts - “fixing broken clothes” and the reselling of used clothes on their website.

However, some participants had critiques for Patagonia. Overall, they commented on Patagonia’s price as a deterrent from purchases. One person suggested that a tactic in getting more consumers would be to lower prices. Additionally, while the group said that they support environmentally-conscious brands, their perception of Patagonia did not change after learning the specifics of their efforts. However, one person said Patagonia could “use social media to highlight their environmental policies.” Another participant said Patagonia should also “be more involved in local communities for environmental efforts.” One focus group member vocalized his opinion that while Patagonia is conscious, they could do more. This participant also expressed he had mixed feelings about the brand because of its use of Native American patterns and culture without proper acknowledgement of the source. He said he is a member of Carolina Indian Circle, and they have had conversations about Patagonia’s use of these symbols. The other participants did not indicate they had any knowledge of this issue. The one participant said that despite his concerns, he does still purchase from Patagonia because of the progressive environmental policies.

### **Discussion:**

Our focus group fostered a lot of extremely helpful information, and the dynamic was one that was open and communicative. Respondents did not often speak over one another, and conversation flowed naturally. Although many of our respondents expressed interest in benefitting the environment when they can, they also made it clear that the prices offered by Patagonia often discourage purchases. This gap between behaviors and attitudes highlights the limitations of the company’s current business model, which is characterized by consumers making long-term purchases that are expected to be of high quality and durability. Increasing the range of products offered may open new demographics of consumers and allow for higher accessibility to the brand. Given Patagonia’s products often come with high price tags the brand has been associated with making both stylistic and economic statements. We aim to address this problem by creating new avenues for sales to lower-income demographics while maintaining the advertisement of more expensive articles of clothing to our current consumer demographics. The most effective way to combat the levels of status associated with the brand is to introduce affordable products that still offer ways to give back to the environment. Examples include accessories, functional outdoor wear such as socks, hats and scarves, and stickers. Since the

participants also expressed interest in pullovers, shirts, and shorts, these will be emphasized as well.

During our focus group, we asked questions concerning consumer purchasing habits, which allowed us to gain insight into who was most likely to buy athletic wear from Patagonia. Notably, women were purchasing clothes more frequently, and had more insight into their wardrobe instead of purchasing primarily due to seasonal changes and necessity. This showed that Patagonia could have success marketing to women. We believe we could pair the want to buy from environmentally friendly brands to a female demographic, and enhance our market share of athleisure wear for the Patagonia brand. As we suspected, the majority of participants related Patagonia with outdoor wear, despite some even having articles of clothing they use during their daily lives. Our goal is to switch this perception. This focus group showed us that if Patagonia can justify their pricing (a point of contention against the brand) and market these materials to the right individuals, they can sell more daily wear products. The focus group showed perception of Patagonia is highly positive overall, and their earth-friendly efforts are a factor in the way the brand is perceived. An unexpected concern from our focus group included Native American appropriation. Patagonia will make it a goal to address these concerns and get Native American artists credit when their patterns are used. The company will also reach out to different Native American communities and discuss with them how to appropriately respect their cultures.

### **Moderator's Guide: Patagonia**

#### INTRODUCTION AND WARMUP (<2min)

All written questions will be accompanied with powerpoint slides.

- Introduce Moderator:  
Moderator is Lia Esposito, and the purpose of the focus group is to poll current opinions on Patagonia and to see if environmentalism has an impact on purchasing decisions.
- Lay out ground rules:
  - No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view and don't answer based on what you think we want to hear
  - Don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully
  - Only one person speaking at a time (use raise hand function click participants section)
  - We're on a first name basis :)
  - Turn off cell phones :(
  - My role as moderator is simply to guide discussion; talk to each other :)
- Introduction question (Icebreaker) (Type in Chat)
  - What's your name and what is your favorite type of breakfast food, please type out in the chat!

#### INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS (3 minutes)

- What type of brand do you think patagonia is?
- Do you enjoy spending time outdoors?
- How often do you purchase clothing?

#### TRANSITION QUESTIONS (3min)

- Do you consider yourself politically active?

- What would you consider purchasing or have you bought from Patagonia? (why and what)
- What type of people do you think wear patagonia?
- Do you support environmentally-conscious brands? (delve into how/why)
- What do you look for in the clothes you purchase?
  - *Do you look for quality, environmentalism, price, brand name, origin country ex?*
- Do you think Patagonia is environmentally friendly :) or unfriendly :( ? (Prob on why if necessary)
  - Can put :) and :( on slideshow and then have everyone in the chat type :) or :(

#### KEY QUESTIONS (8min)

- How much are you aware of Patagonia's environmental efforts? If so, where did you learn about their efforts?

#### Breakdown of environmentalism and Patagonia→ fun slideshow :)

- Does this knowledge of Patagonia's environmental efforts change your opinion on the brand?
- How often do you consider a company's environmental policies when you make purchasing decisions? Does this apply to this company?
- What could Patagonia do to convince you to buy more athletic wear from the company?
- How do you think patagonia could make it more known of their efforts?

#### ENDING QUESTIONS (4min)

- After this discussion, what do you think is important to look for in clothing?
- If environmentalism doesn't convince you to buy from Patagonia, what will, if anything?
- Did we miss anything?